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ABSTRACT

The "lived reality" of secondary schooling for ten young gay men and the impact of this "reality" upon their emerging sexual identities is explored in this study. Two semi-structured interviews were held with each participant which allowed for the exploration of peer group culture, social and sexual activities, teachers, curriculum, counselors and identity management strategies. The discussion of these contexts is framed by a consideration of social constructionist and post structuralist ideas which challenge the current positioning of sexual minority youth as "abnormal," "unnatural," and "unacceptable." In light of these experiences the young men constructed what they perceived were "acceptable" masculine identities that enabled them to survive heterosexist and homophobic school environments. The discussion that follows suggests that schools need to challenge hegemonic practices that currently reinforce the binaries of heterosexual/homosexual and masculine/feminine in both classrooms and the wider school environment. These perceptions are held up in comparison to the young men's reflections of the research process they have been involved in, suggesting potential for personal change that can be elicited through the provision of venues and opportunities that allow for an exploration of potential identities that "read against the text" of "normal," "masculine," and "heterosexual." Contains 32 references. (Author)

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Is it Safe to Come Out Yet ? : The impact of secondary schooling on the positive identity development of ten young gay men.

or

That's a queer way to behave ?

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Paper presented to the New York meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April, 1996.

[1] A series of cartoons have been produced by Linda James for this study. She can be contacted at 20 Jefkins Road, Southbrook, Rangiora, New Zealand. If using the cartoons in any form acknowledgement of her as artist is required.

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Abstract:

Is it Safe to Come Out Now? : The impact of secondary schooling on the positive identity development of ten young gay men.

or

That's a queer way to behave ?

This study explores the 'lived reality' of secondary schooling for ten young gay men and the impact this 'reality' has on their emerging sexual identity. Two semi-structured interviews were held with each participant which allowed for the exploration of peer group culture, social and sexual activities, teachers, curriculum, counsellors and identity management strategies. The discussion of these contexts is framed by a consideration of social constructionist and post structuralist ideas which challenge the current positioning of sexual minority youth as 'abnormal', 'unnatural' and 'unacceptable'. In light of these experiences the young men constructed what they perceived were 'acceptable' masculine identities that enabled them to survive heterosexist and homophobic school environments. The discussion that follows suggests that schools need to challenge hegemonic practices that currently reinforce the binaries of heterosexual/homosexual and masculine/feminine in both classrooms and the wider school environment. These perceptions are held up in comparison to the young men's reflections of the research process they have been involved in, suggesting potential for personal change that can be elicited through the provision of venues and opportunities that allow for an exploration of potential identities that 'read against the text' of 'normal', 'masculine' and 'heterosexual'.

Is it safe to come out now ? or That's a queer way to behave ?

Shane Town

> I was always planning on killing myself. It was always in the back of my mind that I would, I was going to do it before anyone found out I was gay, I didn't want to embarrass my family which is what I thought would happen when people found out I was gay...I never knew it was possible to live and be happy as a gay person..as soon as I realised I was gay it seemed completely impossible to be happy. (Andy)[2]
>
> now I do want to be more in the spotlight..to make up for the years I haven't been..it is a kind of release when you are 'out' and have told people..you do not have to worry about anything... (William)
>
> there is more to identity than meets the eye and individuals do not live their identity as hierarchies, as stereotypes, or in installments.
>
> Deborah Britzman, *What is this thing called Love*?, p.65

In this paper I will discuss the 'lived' reality of ten young gay men, their perceptions of their schooling and the impact these have had on their construction of 'gay' male identities. Andy's plan to kill himself is the result of the combined forces operating on gay male youth in communities and schools to limit their life opportunities and encourage the positioning of sexual minority youth as 'deviant', 'abnormal' and 'unacceptable'. An analysis of such environments is necessary to increase our understanding of the violence being played out on male youth who do not conform to heterosexual and masculine ideals. Through understanding and documenting these forces we can place pressure on policy makers, teachers and students alike to create institutional and attitudinal change that can increase the possibilities for 'queer' youth.

Recent literature and theorising about sexuality calls into question the limitations of existing research on sexuality and identity. Yet there is still an apparent dearth of research concerning itself with the experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered youth and the way they are positioned in schools. In writing this paper and undertaking research into the lived experiences of gay male youth in schools I have struggled with the contradictions of fixed and limiting definitions of (homo and hetero)sexuality produced by psycho-social discourses and the challenges posed by post structural writers and queer theorists (Sedgwick, 1993; Britzman, 1995a:b ;Eyre, 1993; Warner, 1993) who offer alternative perceptions of sexuality as fluid and changing, dependent upon context and positioning. My response has been to move theoretically toward the 'queer' and away from the traditional views of sexuality.

However, as I am challenged by the voices of gay male students I perceive that there has been little comparative shift in the way in which (homo and hetero)sexuality is constructed within school contexts and discourses and the ensuing treatment of lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgendered youth.

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[2] Aotearoa/New Zealand has the third highest rate of male youth suicide in the Western world. Issues of sexuality and the way in which schools and communities deal with them is still not addressed by researchers in this country seeking to explain why young males are killing themselves at such an alarming rate. 38 per 100 000 16 - 24 year old males kill themselves per year in Aotearoa/New Zealand (cited in Evening Post 1995)

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Writing on the topic of (homo)sexuality in Aotearoa/New Zealand is minimal and has tended to focus on telling gay and lesbian stories of growing up.[3] These landmarks have achieved a disruption to dominant heterosexist discourses which are now developing into academic discourses focusing on sexuality and identity. However, there still appears to be a taboo on recognising research and writing in Aotearoa/New Zealand that explores the positioning of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered youth in schools.

I am using the notion of 'venues' to conceptualise the multi levels and spaces represented within the macro and micro contexts of education. In the macro context venues can be identified as Government legislation, Ministry of Education Policy and Curriculum Documents, and the places in which these are negotiated and acted out in the sphere of education such as schools, universities and communities. In the micro contexts venue can be interpreted as teacher-pupil interactions, enacted and hidden curricula, peer group relationships and interactions, school texts and as well as this the physical spaces these inhabit; staffrooms, classrooms, playgrounds. As well as these physical spaces, venues represent the personal spaces and struggles we have inside our heads, to 'fix' our gendered and sexual identities within current understandings. For gay male youth constructing an 'acceptable' and fixed masculine and heterosexual identity exacts a tremendous toll. In suggesting the creation of new venues, I argue that we need to find new spaces in our heads that allow us to reconceptualise sexuality as fluid and provide the physical venues in which the implications of new ways of thinking about sexual and gendered identities can be safely explored.

The discussion that follows identifies the limited possibilities available to gay male youth through the enacted curriculum, school environment, classroom and peer group relationships. The images of gay male communities and identities offered within these contexts serve to reinforce the binary constructions of male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual effectively marginalising the experience and positioning of the participants in this study within their schools.

The perceptions the participants have of their schooling contexts and relationships suggest that the provision of venues and discourses in schools that allow for the exploration of possible and potential gender and sexual identities is central to their development of self esteem and self worth. Ultimately, schools need to take on board their responsibilitites to all youth (heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered) and create contexts, discourses and venues where the deconstruction of sexuality and gender can occur, where students and communities can be encouraged to explore as Britzman (1995b) suggests, what they cannot bear to know, as well as what they do not know and what they have a responsibility to know. As suggested by the perceptions of the young men in this study this will require a complete rethinking and repositioning of sexuality and its place in our lives. Only when the silences are broken, current contexts are understood and new discourses and venues established, can the yawning chasm between the suicidal feelings expressed by Andy while hiding his 'gayness' and the relief and pride experienced by William when he ceased to 'hide' his sexuality and 'came out' be bridged.

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[3] I need to acknowledge contributions of people such as Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Alison Laurie, Julie Glamuzina, James Allan amongst others, who have written material on growing up gay and lesbian in Aotearoa/New Zealand and their stories which form a substantial part of our present understandings of sexuality and challenge the silences that exist.

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This paper outlines the guiding national and schools legislation in Aotearoa/New Zealand that provide windows of opportunity for the introduction of gay/lesbian/bisexual and transgendered issues in education. Following the outline of these contexts, a discussion of the theories which I have used to frame the analysis of the young men's stories are explored. My experiences as an 'out' gay male teacher and researcher which have guided my approach to the research questions, design and implementation, and the process by which I identified and set up the interviews with the young men is described.

Into these contexts a consideration of the perceptions the young men provide of their emerging sexual identities in their school contexts; the silences, the attempts at inclusion, their experience within their peer group, their relationships with teachers, both inside the classroom and beyond are discussed. In light of these experiences the young men constructed what they perceived were 'acceptable' masculine identities that enabled them to survive heterosexist and homophobic school environments. These perceptions are held up in comparison to the young men's reflections of the research process they have been involved in, suggesting potential for personal change that can be elicited through the provision of venues and opportunities to explore potential identities that 'read against the text' of 'normal', 'masculine' and 'heterosexual'. (Britzman,1995b)

The Aotearoa/New Zealand Contexts :

Prior to the 1990s there was little or no mention of lesbian, bisexual or gay sexuality and the arising issues in education by professionals involved at either local or national levels of education management and implementation. The Homosexual Law Reform which was hotly debated throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1985/1986 raised community awareness of the issues confronting lesbians and gay males in the community. However, this debate was heavily focussed on the 'adult' gay and lesbian communities and did not consider the position of youth or the potential role of schools as venues in which issues of sexuality could be explored.

The proposed legislation at the time included two parts. The first was to decriminalise homosexual acts and the second was to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. The first part of the bill, the decriminalisation of homosexual acts was successful in this instance, however the Human Rights legislation had its passage blocked until it was introduced and passed along with anti-discriminatory HIV/AIDS clauses in 1993. The legislation although successful in providing for non-discriminatory practice does not address the issue of disadvantage or provide any future recognition of lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and gay youth or educators as a 'disadvantaged' group within our schools and communities. This would require the repositioning of gay male youth from the boundaries of the binaries where they are perceived as abnormal, unnatural and deviant.

In April 1993 the Ministry of Education produced a document called School Charters and the Revised National Guidelines. The National Education Guidelines outline ten educational goals for schools. They form the basis of the contract between Boards of Trustees and the Crown and are audited and reviewed by the Ministry of Education. Three of the goals are relevant to sexual minority youth and suggest windows of opportunity for the challenging of current perceptions of gay/lesbian/bisexual and transgendered youth.[4]

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[4] The relevant legislation require Boards of Trustees to ensure : (1). The highest standards of achievement, through programmes which enable all students to reach their full potential as individuals and to develop the values needed to become full members of New Zealand Society. (2). Equality of educational opportunity for all New Zealanders by identifying and removing all barriers to achievement. (3.) Success in their learning for those with special needs by ensuring that they are identified and receive appropriate support (Education Gazette, 29/4/93:3 & 4).

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These legislative changes have meant that schools are now legally required to demonstrate how the needs of all students, including lesbian, bisexual, transgender and gay students are being met. Despite the existence of legislation designed to cater to the needs of these students, it is ultimately up to the school to act on it in the interests of lesbian and gay youth. It is clear that equity policies and procedures do not nessecarily create safer schools for lesbian and gay youth. (Quinlivan and Town, 1995).

In entering into the discourses surrounding sexuality education and the positioning of lesbian and gay youth within these discourses, queer activists and theorists are often challenged for their personal bias [5]. Discourses often concern themselves with verifying a gay and lesbian presence rather than focussing on what the needs are for sexual minority youth, effectively limiting the possibilities available to them. The discussion that follows establishes a basis for the exploration of the needs of gay male youth in respect to schooling and signal issues that need to be addressed for all youth in respect to sexual identity in its widest sense. The provision of venues in which sexuality and identity can be explored by youth and by professionals is central to this argument.

The Influences : Queer theories ?

The theoretical framework that follows reflect the pathways I have followed through undertaking this research. In the early stages my reading was focused on writing that exploring identity development from the perspective of from the psycho-social tradition; (Troiden,1989 ; Coleman,1982 ; Cass 1990). As my reading and understanding of the young men's experiences grew and my appreciation of identity issues became more complex I began to investigate social constructionist and post structuralist writers such as (Sears,1991;1992; Weeks, 1989; Mac An Ghaill,1994; Warner, 1993; Britzman, 1995a;b). It is the application of these writers perceptions and research into sexual identities and gender roles, and their relationship to schooling that I raise for discussion in the framework below.

Identity development in adolescence in the Western tradition, has been a major topic of research, philosophy, psychology, theology and education in the twentieth century and has been influenced by the historical development of medical, moral and legal definitions of what constitutes acceptable behaviour and identity. The psycho sexual legacy left by Freud and modified and developed by theorists such as Erikson and Marcia et al to include social aspects of development has been largely responsible for the acceptance of a 'scientific' and 'rational' approach to sexual orientation as part of a larger identity development. The result of these approaches has been to construct identity and identity acquisition as a destiny that is ultimately somehow fixed at its pivotal point dependent on the successful resolution and integration of stages of development.

Recent writings have questioned this approach. Sears (1992;1991), Sedgewick (1990) and Fitzgerald (1993) for a variety of reasons argue that sexual identity and desire are fluid

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In addition to the educational goals outlined in the document, National Administration Guidelines were also specified. These also contained clauses relevant to lesbian and gay youth: (5.) Each Board of Trustees is also required to :(5.1). Provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students. (5.2). To comply in full with any legislation currently in force or that may be developed to ensure the safety of students and employees.

[5] For example, discourse is centred around establishing the exact proportions of the lesbian and gay communities, statistics range from a possible 10% downwards. These serve to reinforce the binary opposition of heterosexual majority and homosexual minority.

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rather than fixed and unchanging. This recognition of fluidity suggests that the psycho-social frame outlined above that has dominated a century of thought has limited our thinking, constrained our analysis and maintained the constructed binary oppositions of gay/straight, male/female, natural/unnatural. Social constructionist and post structural writing suggests that identity is a matter of choice rather than destiny. For those groups in society who experience 'otherness' and/or marginalisation it becomes a political choice. In particular for gay, lesbian and bisexual people sexuality becomes defining in a political sense in the way in which their identities challenge the heterosexist hegemony and that hegemony frames as normal and natural and therefore able to be included.

The Construction of Sexuality

Social constructionists such as Sears (1991;1992) and Weeks (1985;1991) suggest that the prevailing representation in society of homosexuality as deviant is a result of 'historical context' (p.4). The construction of the gay male and lesbian female as deviant is seen as a possible explanation for the marginalisation and silencing of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and educators in our schools (Quinlivan,1994; p.20). Weeks (1991) goes on to suggest that central to the 'social constructionist' case is an identification of 'the real forces at play, the complex interaction of power and domination on the one hand, and resistance on the other' (p.5). It is only through an exploration of intersections of power, dominance and resistance that we can then understand the complex role that sexuality plays in our present lives and through this history identify the resistance strategies employed by gay, lesbian and bisexual men and women to challenge the prevailing heterosexist hegemony.

Foucault (1979;1982) maintains that power is a central theme in determining the relationship between sexuality and the way in which it has been socially and historically constructed as 'abnormal' and 'unnatural'. Foucault (1976, p.12) also stresses that there is no such thing as a sexual essence, in terms of desire, behaviour or identity; heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. He instead argues that the discourses surrounding sexuality produced by Western medical and professional institutions through the late nineteenth century have created a way in which the state can administer control over peoples 'bodies, desires and pleasures.' He goes onto suggest that sexual liberation therefore becomes a freedom from all existing discourses about sex and sexual identity. The concept of sexuality as a fixed identity and category for classification is therefore a modern construct, as are all the categories organised around the heterosexual/homosexual polarity tied in with the 'normal' or 'inverted' masculine/feminine gender roles.

Jacques Derrida has also had a significant impact on the development of social constructivist thinking. His analysis of the binary oppositions and their inherently violent nature has provided the deconstructivists with the understanding that natural only exists in relation to unnatural, homosexual in relation to heterosexual, normal in relation to perverse. The hierarchical relationship is clear as is the power dynamic of the dominant group.

Foucault and Derrida have been used extensively by social constructionists such as Weeks (1985;1991), Connell (1989), Sears (1991), Segal (1990;1994), Mac An Ghaill (1994) in particular for their idea that there is no biological essence concerning sexuality or gender. The issue of masculinity is considered as a social construction rather than a biological given, and critiques of the masculine/feminine binary can be linked to those applied to sexuality and gender. There is a difference between the focus of these theorists and those who hold post structuralist and 'queerly theoretical' views. The latter focus their analysis and application of Foucault on the possibilities his theories raise for political action and personal resistance, rather than on the nature/nurture and essentialism versus constructivism debates.

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Sears (1991, p.23) cites Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin and Gebhart's 1953 study where they conclude that 'exclusive preference of behaviour, heterosexual or homosexual, comes only with experience or as a result of social pressures which tend to force an individual into an exclusive pattern of one side or the other.' As a result Sears suggests that identity is a process in which individuals journey towards an understanding of self through an interpretation and reinterpretation of their 'lived experience' (Ibid; p.18) in an attempt to reconcile their personal identity with the past. These 'journeys' do not happen within a social or historical vacuum, they are identities constructed through language, 'social scripts and cultural history'. Sears like Weeks (1991, p.19) sees the gay and lesbian movements as a political effort to establish spaces for homosexual - identified persons within an already constructed 'social, political, economic and spiritual paradigm'. Only through this process are the practices of sexual minority politics, economies, communities and history able to work alongside and within the dominant accepted heterosexual culture.

Weeks (1991, p.42) similarly suggests that if homosexuality is not the result of an essence belonging to a minority but is in Foucault's terms, one of many sexual possibilities inherent in all bodies then the marginalisation and construction of gay men and lesbian women is the result of social and cultural forces that reinforce the dominant heterosexual discourse. He develops this idea into an analysis of the centrality of the historically and culturally constructed concept of the nuclear family and by extension heterosexuality as 'natural'. As Weeks states the family is 'an intersection of various developments, including the development of childhood and the social differentiation between men and women' and that the privilege of heterosexuality is directly related to the 'construction of masculinity and femininity within the monogamous (and socially constituted) family' (Ibid, p.44).

These constructions according to Weeks (1991) and Sears (1991) place limitations and constraints on the possibilities of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Sears suggests that the comfort found through identifying as gay , lesbian or bisexual by the youth in his study, has the potential to limit the possibilities for personal growth and self realisation. Similiarly, Weeks argues that as sexuality is socially constructed rather than biologically determined, it should not be seen as identity but as a 'propensity'. This propensity is determined by the interplay of a whole series of social discourses, interactions and encounters, the combination of which come to have meaning in structuring sexual identities. Therefore identifying as gay or lesbian potentially limits the possibilities for further personal growth and knowledge as the gay male or lesbian woman becomes conditioned within their own community of identity.

Sexuality, Masculinity and Schooling : A Cock in a Frock at School ?

Sears (1991) explores within his study the important role that schools play as a major institution responsible for the transmission of sexual beliefs and considered 'norms'. The school curriculum, environment and practices are geared toward the support and perpetuation of an exclusively heterosexist and masculine agenda designed to reinforce prevailing notions of 'normal' sexuality and actively marginalise and silence gay, lesbian and bisexual youth.

Similarly, Mac An Ghaill (1994) suggests that schools are 'masculinising agencies' and as such, gay male students are further removed to the margins by dominant school discourses surrounding what is rewarded and sanctioned by masculine heterosexual ideals. Therefore an understanding of the interplay between sexuality and masculinity in the school setting is vital as a framework in which to conceptualise the experiences of gay male youth in this study.

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Mac An Ghaill draws on Connell's (1987) work in pursuing the social construction of masculinity. Connell argues that masculinity and femininity are socially prescribed behaviours and therefore opposes the essentialist views that suggest they are biologically determined. Connell points to the construction of hegemonic masculinity to explain the existence of dominant and subordinate forms of masculine. As a result of this the heterosexual male is dominant in his relationship to women as much as he is dominant in his relationship to gay males, creating a patriarchal social order in which occurs the global domination of women. As gay males are seen to be constructed as 'feminine' by both the medical and psycho-social legacies this domination is extended to be inclusive of them as a category.

Mac An Ghaill (1994), Connell (1987), Segal (1994) describe the construction and replication of 'acceptable' masculine behaviours as creating hierarchies within male groups. Those that display 'macho' behaviours are rewarded and reinforced through admittance to the dominant male culture while those that display 'feminine' behaviours are relegated to the margins and are seen as being deficient in strength and courage, assumed to be weak, soft and inferior. The implications this holds for male youth regardless of sexual orientation is significant. Heterosexual and non-heterosexual males alike who do not conform to masculine ideals become labelled as 'poofters' and homosexuals. Whereas non-heterosexual males who do conform have the added dilemma of being unable to identify with the constructions and interpretations of 'gay' as defined by Western society in general.

Schools have a significant role to play in perpetuating the myths surrounding masculinity and sexuality. Mac An Ghaill suggests schools actively promote homophobia, mysogyny and compulsory heterosexuality through the legitimisation of masculine ideals. Heterosexual males are able to within their peer group expel all that is considered feminine and non-heterosexual, and therefore undesirable. This process occurs both internally and externally. An individual male will expel from his behaviour and persona all that is associated as feminine and non-heterosexual, as well as contribute to the peer group's exclusion of individuals who display those characteristics. In constructing an 'acceptable' identity access to male privilege and structures of hegemonic masculinity can be gained. These processes are supported by a male biased curriculum that celebrates ideals of masculinity, a school environment where males dominate in the playground and classroom and teacher practice which supports and rewards male dominance in the classroom and playground. (Alton-Lee and Densem, 1992), (Mac An Ghaill, 1994). These processes will form a significant part of the discussion and analysis of the perceptions of the young men involved in this study, and provide a variety of contexts in which to discuss the ways in which their voices have been silenced by dominant male and heterosexist discourses.

Queer Theory and Pedagogies

An exploration of post-structuralist theory and its relationship to queer theory is useful in that it focuses the discussion on change in recognising the personal as political. Post-structuralist theory acknowledges the development of personal meanings. In so doing it makes significant the voices of the young gay men who have shared their stories and provides a framework for considering the development of their adult identities through the complex interplay of these influences.

Queer theory has at its core an activist approach to creating change. Organisations such as Act Up in Britain, Queer Nation and Queer Planet in the United States, Glee[6] in

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[6] Glee - Gays and Lesbians Everywhere in Education. This is an organisation of educators that operates to educate about issues of queer sexuality in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Aotearoa/New Zealand have sought to create political structures which facilitate the empowerment and politicisation of lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Parallel to its activist stance has been the development of post structuralist writing that seeks to redefine the role that sexuality has been perceived to play in determining identity and the limits that this has placed on categorising and constricting definitions of homosexuality within the binaries of masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, natural/unnatural (Sedgwick, 1993). The positioning of the politics of personal identity is at the core of the post structural dilemma.

One of the solutions to the dilemmas of inclusion that have paralysed lesbian/gay/bisexual collaboration has been the adoption of the word 'queer' as a label by people who perceive their politics to extend beyond those who simply identify as gay or lesbian and request acceptance from the heterosexual community. Queer theorists and activists oppose the normalisation of the modern 'gay' and 'lesbian' person and are therefore equally opposed to both the heterosexual and homosexual mainstream. They instead perceive the hetero/homo divide as being central to issues of domination and exclusion on a global scale that extend far beyond ideas surrounding sexuality. Sedgwick (1993:1) suggests that " many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth century Western culture as a whole are structures - indeed fractured by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition.." Therefore to be inclusive of the multiple possibilities provided through interplays between gender, culture, ethnicity, sexuality and class, we must reject constraining identities and deconstruct the binaries (Ibid).

More recently, literature which examines what a queer pedagogy may mean in educational contexts has begun to emerge. As Bryson and DeCastell (1993, p.299) point out, there are multifarious ways in which queer pedagogy could be defined. Their experiences after actively attempting to incorporate a 'dialogue of differences' into a university Women's Studies course, lead them to conclude that encouraging students of difference to exercise their experiences was a messy but worthwhile teaching strategy to employ. This paper explores one aspect of queer pedagogy which is the provision of venues in which issues of sexuality and masculinity can be explored, and different readings of possible masculine subjectivities can be raised.

Where am I ?

As a Pakeha[7] male my involvement in gay and lesbian rights as a political movement began with the campaign for homosexual law reform in New Zealand/Aotearoa throughout 1985 and 1986. This necessitated my coming out as a gay teacher in my school as the campaign was extremely vocal and public.

I found the experience of being an 'out' gay male educator, the problematic nature of masculinity, my exclusion from accepted masculine ideals and my 'sissie' past reinforced my feelings that life for gay male youth was still under threat (Rofes, 1995). This was reinforced by my feelings that the decriminalisation of Homosexual Acts (1986) and the associated education of the public in general had done little to improve or change the status, positioning and experience of gay male youth in schools from the time I experienced my secondary schooling in the 1970s.

One of the effects of this was to isolate me from potential venues in which my own experiences of youth and school could be explored. As a gay youth I had experienced bullying at school and had fallen into the category of school sissie. I had also experienced

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[7] New Zealand European

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the powerlessness of the adult community and the unwillingness on the part of my school to intervene to prevent this from occurring.

As a gay adult I had not been able to articulate my feelings because of the gay male communities' reluctance to acknowledge marginalisation on the grounds of what was perceived as a 'weakness'. As a result of these perceptions I decided to create a place within the projects I was undertaking for my own story and this has become a central way to contextualise the experiences of my participants. Being able to see my experience at times reflected in the young mens' stories created a venue for the re-examination of my own story and has aided in the development of my own theoretical understanding of how issues of sexuality need to be re-examined in relation to the school context.

The Research Process : Is this particularly Queer ?

Entering a gay community to research gay youth from an 'academic' perspective as an educationalist is relatively new to Aotearoa/New Zealand. Apart from Sears (1991;1992a), Trentchard and Warren (1984), Mac An Ghaill (1994) and Quinlivan (1994) there are few guidelines on appropriateness for the process in terms of both academia and the communities and venues in which the research is taking place. I have relied heavily on Sears (1992a) and Quinlivan (1994) but have also drawn on a number of feminist and Maori feminist perspectives in an attempt to frame the approach taken.

What is queer about this research is its intention through its methodology to attempt to create change through the provision of venues in which both the voices of a gay male teacher and researcher and that of gay male students can be heard simultaneously. In breaking the silence of both groups it also inherently challenges myths of deviancy and paedophilia ma when the two worlds are brought together.

I began this research wanting to understand the experiences of young gay men in schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The research questions I began with focused on exploring the young men's perceptions of their school contexts and the impact these contexts had on their identity development. With the help of the Icebreakers network[5] I contacted ten young gay males in two urban centres in New Zealand. The participants ranged in age from 15 to 21. At the time of the interviews two were still at secondary school, the remaining eight were involved in tertiary study of some sort. Two participants attended catholic boys' schools and one a state boys' school in an urban setting, while the remaining participants attended co-educational state schools, of which two of these were urban, three suburban, one semi-rural and one rural. One participant identified as 'bicultural', emphasising both his Mäori and European backgrounds as important influences on his life. All remaining participants identified themselves as gay and European.

Using qualitative research methodology two semi-structured interviews were carried out with each participant during 1994 (Glesne & Peshkin, 1993; Sears, 1991; Quinlivan, 1994). I began by contacting each of the participants individually and describing the project, making my position as a gay male educator and researcher clear and the intention of the research apparent. The course of the project was outlined in respect to the time commitment required from each participant. I particularly stressed at this stage that the participants were able to withdraw at any time they wished and were to see themselves as being in control of both the interview process and the transcripts of the interviews. I sent copies of the

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[5]Icebreakers is a network sponsored by the New Zealand AIDS Foundation. They run group sessions for gay and bisexual males aged between 16 and 24.

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interview framework to each participant explaining that the course and content of the questions were negotiable.

Participants controlled the use of the tape recorder. This control was utilised on two occasions; once by a participant who indicated that he wished to switch off the recorder and not explore a particularly painful revisiting of his collusion in homophobic behaviour any further, and once by another participant who wished to explore his suicidal feelings.

The interview framework was developed from the interview schedule designed by Kathleen Quinlivan (1994), that allowed for an exploration of peer culture, social and sexual activities, teachers, curriculum, counsellors and identity management strategies, with some different emphases to allow me to explore intersections of masculinity and sexuality. To this effect, questions pertaining to AIDS education, safe sex, and first sexual experiences were added. Confidentiality was assured through the use of pseudonyms for both the participants, their schools and communities with the exception of one participant Andrew who chose to use his own name.

The interviews were carried out one week apart if possible to allow for the data to be transcribed and reflected on by myself and the participants. Each participant received a copy of their transcript for comment. These relections/additions/deletions were then incorporated into the transcript and analysis. Each transcript has been analysed in respect to the categories of issues of; identity, peer group experiences, teachers and counsellors, home contexts and curriculum. Applying a post structural framework has been useful to analyse these categories for where binaries such as public/private, normal/abnormal, heterosexual/homosexual, masculine/feminine intersect in the reflections of the participants. Although the final report is still in progress participants have received (as they have been written) chapters for their reflections to be added. The discussion which follows utilises these binaries to show how they operate to limit the possibilities available to the young men in this study.

Identities : public constructions /private lives and the school environment ?

> I was very unhappy because like..I was showing my emotions, like when I was angry or upset and they hassled me for doing that but never asked me why.....(James)

What is clear from the experiences of the young men is the significance of their primary and secondary schooling in contributing to their negative perceptions of what 'being gay' is and the role that schools have in representing accurately the diversity of sexuality, and of the communities associated with various sexual identities. The information the participants received about the possibilities of being 'gay' and the multiple meanings this may have came ostensibly from discourses surrounding their peer group, the school curriculum and popular culture. This section explores the participants' reflections on the points at which they could identify their emerging 'gay' sexuality and the influences that facilitated this 'discovery'.

For the purposes of this paper sexual identity is recognised as having three separate but interlinked components; sexual behaviour, sexual orientation and sexual identity (Fitzgerald, 1993). Sexual orientation identifies the sexual feelings that one has for others; these could be considered to be predominantly homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual, sexual behaviour is the acting out of these feelings and sexual identity is the assumption of an identity. In this respect there may not always be an 'agreement' between sexual orientation, behaviour and identity making explanations and descriptions of gay male identity more complex and apparently contradictory than given credit in recent literature.

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For the young men in this study this is true at varying times. Mark, Richard, James, Andy, William, Sasha, Zak, and Alex each come to perceive their sexual identity as 'gay' to themselves when they recognised their sexual feelings for their same sex but before having same-sex sexual experiences that would confirm this. However, Andrew and Peter were both involved in sexual behaviour that was homosexual before identifying to themselves that they were 'gay'.

Emerging sexual identities and school discourses

> When I was younger I guess I didn't think there was such a word as heterosexual either so I didn't think I was heterosexual. (Richard)

With the advent of adolescence sexual aspects of the self emerge as increasingly central and the issues surrounding nonheterosexuality and the impact of school silences become more apparent for the young men in this study. For all the participants their emerging sexual identity is framed and limited by the pervasive heterosexism of their school environments and the limited opportunities made available for exploring (hetero and homo)sexuality in any sense. At the time when their sexual identities were emerging several of the young men had either no framework or concept of heterosexuality or homosexuality into which to locate their feelings of sexual attraction. For Richard (as indicated above) this meant that he did not have the language for either heterosexuality or homosexuality. For Peter, the existence of sexuality as a learned and 'given' behaviour combined with a perception of public and private as separate venues in which sexuality and identity are played out is significant to his understanding and acting out of his sexual identity.

> I guess it's just...a basic rule that you learn, you're brought up with, you don't even consiously think about it, it's in your subconscious. You're brought up with it, it's just like...eating or...manners or something like that. It just comes in your mannerisms, what we do in public and what we do in private is a separate set of rules. (Peter)

The participants' ideas about their homosexuality begin with the perceptions they have of the possibilities and limitations of meaning supplied for them by institutions of family, school, church and community in their pre-adolescent lives. Compounding the limited opportunities provided for the young men in respect to potential sexual identities which offers heterosexuality as the only option are the controls existing over possibilities of sexual practice. There is an implicit understanding that homosexual desires should be 'hidden' in respect to achieving a masculine identity, along with sexual practices that have the potential to expose this. As Britzman (1995a, p.67) writes 'circulating within the terms of private and public, and within the terms of adult and child, are the given and possible meanings of sexuality.' For eight of the participants it was possible to continue to explore homosexuality through sexual practice as long as this was 'private' and within an accepted heterosexual identity.

Peter and William recognised sexual feelings for other males when they were at Intermediate but had no concept of what being 'gay' was.

> Okay...my feeling gay, I guess my first instinct was after about '82 (at the age of ten)...I couldn't like put a name to that feeling but I just sort of felt that way and it didn't really bother me, but I knew I had to get over that. (Peter)

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> well I never knew the word gay and what it meant. I suppose (I realised) quite young, I realised that I found the same sex interesting and that was probably around the end of second form, third form...around twelve.....as I got older..the first thing is that I learned the word for what I was..I found out what gay meant..then I kind of identified with the definition of gay..I was in the third form so I was thirteen...(William)

Four of the participants talk of the pervasive feelings of difference they had experienced for as long as they could remember as indicators that they were gay. This is also related to their feelings of masculinity and how they felt they were not following what was deemed 'appropriate' behaviour for boys determined by their preference for developing relationships with girls during their pre adolescent years. The 'costs' to the participants sense of masculinity was also a consideration as the information they had received concerning 'gay' identity suggested that they had to relinguish ideas of masculine identity should they choose to come out as a gay man.

For Alex this meant that he aligned his feelings of 'difference' with behaviours that were associated with feminine gender showing how sexuality is used to police gender roles. (Blumenfeld, 1992).

> Probably earlier ..11 or 12 although I knew earlier ..I can't remember..I always knew I was different.when I was younger I always played with girls and not boys..I like netball.. reading....the usual..isn't it ? (Alex).

For Sasha, Andy, Richard and Zak identifiying as gay provided an explanation for their sexual attraction towards other boys during their early adolescence. This knowledge came to them even though they had not been exposed to any images of gay male life or community which meant they were unable to provide a satisfactory context in which to explore their feelings and thus provide a framework for their possible meanings. These perceptions effectively challenge the myths of recruitment that still exist within the community that suggest older gay men 'recruit' younger men to the 'fold' ;[9]

> I think the first time I really remember it was actually probably as early as maybe Intermediate. ...when I was maybe even form one. I suppose I would have been about ten. Um...there were some twins in my class, they were both quite cute and there was one who was really nice, and I was attracted to him, um....yeah. I knew then. I felt differently about him than just friends, or girls or something. (Sasha)

Andy, Sasha, William and Mark were able to link their sexual attraction to a 'gay' identity through exposure to gay male images on television and in the media. The difficulty of experiencing these gay images was felt by all four. Each participant felt that by watching these programmes they were at risk of 'outing' themselves to their families and peer group.

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[9] The use of 'recruitment' by conservative community groups to maintain exclusion of lesbian/gay/bisexual issues from mainstream agendas and equity discourses can be clearly seen in the events surrounding the establishment of a gay/lesbian teacher support group at Hutt Valley High School (see literature review) and more recently in the debates over the showing of 'Express' a gay/lesbian lifestyles programme on community television in the South Island.

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> yeah.. I didn't like talking about... I didn't like being on the topic I even thought the T.V... if I was at home and watching T.V and there was like a gay character on T.V or if there was maybe like some documentary about gays and all that I felt really really awkward...I think I went red. I always felt awkward. I always thought people were gonna notice that I was so awkward. (Andy).

For Sasha and William, however this proved to be a negative experience as the images offered were often stereotyped and limiting in the possibilities they offered.

> I can't think of where I got that from. I suppose I can guess..now I see things on tv..like I was watching 'Are You Being Served' the other night and Mr Humphries you know and it was making fun of camp gay men and stuff... it didn't register with me when I watched it but subconsciously these images and stereotypes that I never thought about but were subconsciously bred into me...(Sasha)

For William exposure to the debates on talk shows such as Donoghue and Oprah made him feel at risk in the school environment because there was no moderating influence on the homophobic reactions offered by his peer group.

> just in the common room, like when Oprah or Donoghue were on at lunch time. If there was ever a gay topic they would then turn it down, it wouldn't be taken in a positive view, and so you kind of got the message from things like that. (William).

The positive or negative impact of these talk shows and the increasing attention popular culture is playing to issues of sexual identity and the impact these have on the positioning of sexual minority youth needs to be explored.

Similarly, for Zak the exposure to a book on puberty allowed him to explain the feelings he was having and his feeling of difference in terms of being gay, however the book also limited his view of the possibility of assuming a gay identity. This identification occurred at 12 however he chose to reject the definition in the hope that he would 'grow out of it', a possibility suggested by the text itself.

> although I knew I was gay when I was 12...but I had denied it until I was about fifteen ..it kind of shocked me ..the first time I was twelve, in form two..when Mum gave me a book about puberty with the chapter about homosexuality..and I thought that is me ..and then I tried to deny it and think that I would change when I got older. (Zak)

The limited access to accurate information about, and in particular homosexuality and queer communities and support is of concern, in light of the way in which the participants became isolated within their schools and families from pursuing any venues in which their emerging sexuality could be explored.

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Limitations of present schooling : the classroom as venue for education about self ?

> I shut it out because I didn't know what I was going to go through, what was going to become of me, was I going to get AIDS when I was twenty..I just didn't want to face up to things....(James)

The role of the school in providing accurate information and venues for exploration of sexual and gendered identities and their components is able to be traced through the participants reflections on their schooling. For all the participants the pervasive silence concerning their experience, feelings and perceptions of their sexual identity contributed to their feelings of isolation and invisibility within their school environments. All of the participants to varying extents felt isolated and disempowered in their schools because there was no reflection of their emerging sexuality within the school environment. Realising that 'coming out' as a gay male would endanger their physical and emotional wellbeing,as well as their status as 'males' in the school environment, they chose instead to manage their gay and lesbian identities and the implications of these themselves, by disguising them. The effects of this have been documented by Sears (1992) and Trenchard and Warren (1984) Quinlivan (1994), Quinlivan and Town (1995); suicide ideation, depression, dysfunctional peer group and family relationships, alcohol and drug use.

Silences

Health Education researchers have drawn attention to the social construction of heterosexism in health curricula and classroom practice by identifying the silences that surround gay and lesbian sexuality (Eyre, 1993; Fine, 1992; Sears, 1992, Quinlivan and Town, 1995). These perceptions were reinforced by the participants;

> Twelve seconds in one year..that is why I remember it because it was the only thing that I got...if I stuck a pencil in my ear I would have missed it..that is the way it goes I suppose...(Mark)

Collusion of teachers

Mark's experience of silence in the context of the classroom was the common experience for each of the participants. Compounding this was the collusion that teachers and administrators made with homophobic behaviour of students. The homophobic behaviour of teachers took several forms. For Andrew it meant that he received no help in combating overt verbal anti-gay treatment in the classroom.

> ... on a couple of occasions it did, not in the same way, but in an embarrassing way and this was when I was younger, this was when I was 13 or 14. I can remember being the classroom and I contributed to the class discussion, and because of the way that I was talking, people were imitating me...making jokes with homosexual connotations and everyone in the class laughed and the teacher laughed with them. So there was no ... you know the teacher didn't say anything except, shhh and laughed herself. (Andrew).

For James the silence about gay life and the inability of staff to prevent or to intervene in violent verbal and physical episodes reinforced the deficit view he had developed concerning masculinity and gay male sexuality. He percieved the lack of positive gay role models as contributing to the negative view of his peer group.

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> ...both from students and from teachers it was very anti-gay um....it wasn't so much anti..it was more that gays didn't exist and if they did it was bad. It was a really bad thing to be like..because there was a hostel there and like the third formers were beaten up by the sixth formers and ..acting queer or not being in a rugby team or not going out shooting ducks or whatever..and I guess they called that faggoty behaviour.....so I suppose it was probably because there was no positive gay role model for them to look up to...for teachers to say you know this person is gay...he or she is really good..(James)

The knowledge of the principal's religious affiliations and suggested homophobia was enough to discourage Zak from 'coming out' in the school environment .

> No...I didn't really need to ...I'm not sure why I didn't but...I didn't need to tell him (the principal)...I didn't need to tell anyone at school because I was deputy head boy and that...it put a little bit of pressure on me..Mr Wiltshire (the principal) was a Baptist and he was pretty homophobic and stuff like that ...I knew I had bursary coming up in seventh form so I just...I wanted to get out..I wanted to pass and get a B....I thought I would just cruise on by and let it linger in the background. (Zak)

For Mark the intervention of teachers when his peer group was exhibiting homophobic behaviour was significant. It was also one of the contributing factors that enabled him to him to be 'out' in his school. However, he recognised that the willingness of teachers to intervene was not consistent across the staff of his school.

> If the teacher hears it ...depending on which teacher you have..you get just 'shut up and sit down' through to one student who was called behind once and um.. lectured about it but it depends on the attitude of the teacher...(Mark)

However this was insufficient to protect him outside of the classroom.

> Oh...just the normal stuff...I think one of their friends was walking in front of me down a corridor and they were standing waiting to get into a class and um...they said 'watch out the guy behind you is queer' or something like that...that sort of thing happens (Mark).

Similarly for Richard the links made by his Physical Education teacher between his sexuality and his masculinity in remarks made in the classroom situation provided a legacy of torment and abuse in his daily life with other students.

> ...they just called me faggot because I was fat .. I think. Oh and I was teased by one of the teachers as well um .. one of the PE teachers called me stubby... he said 'hey stubby' and everyone laughed .. laughed because of that so they called me stubby from then on. (Richard)

This affected the status that Richard had in the classroom and the relationship he had with his teachers. As he implies he had difficulty getting people to listen to him both inside and outside the classroom leading to feelings of frustration.

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> Having been larger and being..having a high voice is different enough to be picked on..another guy I knew who had a high voice and was very thin, he was picked on for being thin..people used to not really listen to what I had to say and I used to get really frustrated about that and no-one wanted to listen to my ideas, no-one wanted to see who I was...I used to feel really rejected. (Richard)

The 'masculine' and 'active' curriculum

The majority of young gay men I interviewed had learnt about sexuality within the context of the Science and/or Health curriculum. By focusing on anatomy, the enacted curriculum perpetuated the separation of physical bodies from feelings and thoughts which meant that issues of identity and feelings were ignored;

> sex education covered only the science side of things...the mechanical...talked about how you get pregnant...how the cells divide...only the physical attributes of the human being (Andrew)

As Andrew points out, the information presented was reproductive and heterosexual. This reinforced the dominant heterosexist hegemony of the school environment sustaining the silences about possible alternative identities;

> I didn't learn anything except how to treat a girl right which wasn't useful at all (William)

William recognised the way in which femaleness was constructed passively in relation to active male sexuality. There was no potential within these scientific models to perceive female sexuality as anything other than passive and therefore active female sexuality was not represented as a possibility.

One of the effects of exposure to present practices of sexuality education within schools has been to reinforce active/ passive roles within male /female binaries. For the gay male participants this resulted in them perceiving that their sexuality was something to be acted upon but not talked about;

> When I was at school the gay community did not exist...I had no knowledge of it..the only knowledge I had was the toilets (Andrew)

This difficulty was reflected in the process of interviewing the young men. Expecting them to talk about their feelings proved to be a difficult exercise because they had never been provided with a venue in which to articulate their gay identity. They were expected to be pursuing more 'manly' pursuits such as sport;

> ... it would be the attitude from the executives at school that boys aren't engaging in sex at the moment ... you know... playing rugby hard and playing cricket hard, studying hard and the sort of thing... (Peter)

Ironically, all but one of the participants had explored the physical dimensions of gay sexuality in playing out their public and private identities, but found it difficult to articulate their feelings about themselves and their place as gay men in a male world. This reflects the dominant male hegemony and how it operates to regulate male behaviour and resulted in the fact that they had seldom had the opportunity to develop a political analysis of their situation and status in the wider community.

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This reinforced the mind/body split and the active/passive binary of masculine and feminine in that it suggests that males need to ensure they separate out their feelings from their public persona, resulting for the participants in their inability to express themselves emotionally;

> It lowered my self esteem basically....I couldn't be myself...I couldn't express myself to other people..I couldn't get close to anyone..even my close friends..I couldn't tell them how I was feeling...I find it hard to express my feelings now...but then I wouldn't express them to anyone. (Zak)

Limitations of an inclusive curriculum

The implementation of HIV/AIDS education as part of the Health curriculum reinforced the models used in the science programmes to further isolate issues of sexuality and identity. This, in conjunction with the media treatment of the crisis, resulted in the young men pathologising gay male sexuality by equating it with intravenous drug users and prostitution;

> we were talking about AIDS and how the people who get AIDS are prostitutes, intravenous drug uses and homosexuals (Richard)

This reinforced the dysfunctional split between mind and body in the perceptions of the participants and acted in a moral sense to shut down their emerging gay male sexuality;

> I was afraid of any sexual contact...with another gay person...it immediately put me off...that is what scares a lot of people who are gay but haven't come out..they see the risk..and believe the risk is so high they couldn't possibly touch someone else. (Andrew)

> I wouldn't go overboard because using the Kinsey statistics we only make up ten percent and a lot of students don't come out until they go to a tertiary institution or into the workforce, ... so I would try to make a little bit of visibility - try and put something into the school that had that information and support there for students (Mark)

This has occurred to some extent for gay men through the decimation of our communities in the AIDS crisis. It has also enabled us to be constructed as victims and therefore worthy of consideration. This has been translated into school practice through the addition of HIV/AIDs education as part of the Health Syllabus and within this a small consideration of sexuality as an issue.

When issues of difference were considered within a curriculum, there was the added dilemma of inclusion and what exploring difference actually meant. In reality the inclusion of lesbian and gay issues served to reinforce the gender binaries inherent within the mainstream curriculum. In an English class studying the *Color Purple* the relationship between Celie and Shug was perceived and taught by the teacher as one of support and comfort rather than as a sexually active lesbian relationship;

> ... he focussed on Celie's feelings about herself... comfort between women (Zak)

For one participant in the study 'inclusion' meant that he had to role play someone attracted to a person of the same sex. This led to him effectively having to question his place in the activity because for him there was no need to role play. The teacher's assumption of the

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heterosexuality of her students was problematic, yet she was attempting to be inclusive of gay and lesbian issues.

> This guy was in my group in drama and we had to roleplay being someone else (attracted to someone of the same sex) ... so I said I'm male but I am gay. (Richard)

Similarly, the inclusion of negative images associated with gay and lesbian youth, suggest that to be gay and lesbian is traumatic and problematic. It risks its translation in the classroom to being reduced to representations of gays and lesbians as traumatised people requiring counselling for the low self esteem that is felt by youth who are gay or lesbian;

> they were talking about people with low self esteem and I remember it was quite an emotional time for me... because I was feeling really down and the teacher was telling a story about a guy who had such low self esteem that he just gave up...(Sasha)

The message for this participant was that there is a point where low self esteem could not be overcome and 'giving up' was seen as the only alternative. These feelings resulted from the lack of any deconstruction of heterosexism and homophobia as destructive forces. They also suggest that there is a failure to recognise that this the responsibility of male hegemonic practices. As stated by one of the participants who ended up being counselled for his sexuality, it was not the fact that he was gay that he needed counselling for, it was the way he was being treated by his peer group;

> now that I've had a chance to look back, it makes me so angry because everyone at school thought 'Poor Alex' ... he is under so much stress because he is gay... I knew that when I was twelve years old and I didn't have a breakdown ... it was because I had this dork telling me I was possessed twenty four hours a day...(Alex)

Alex's experience of having his sexuality become public knowledge in his seventh form year proved devastating. Members of his peer group attempted to 'exorcise' the demons from him that made him 'this way' and he was accused of having contributed to two car accidents and the death of a parent because he happened to be gay. The role his peer group played in limiting Alex's opportunities to explore his sexuality at school and/or in the community suggest a need for school wide programmes and policies addressing issues of sexuality for all youth.

Peer group meanings: faggots, fairies and the Ist XV[10]

> being seventeen and having all your friends being incredibly homophobic...whether or not I would have actually been strong enough to stand up to that... which it was never done...I mean nobody ever confronted them about their homophobic attitudes...which is the problem today . (Andy)

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[10] Ist XV - this is the name used to describe the schools' and nations' rugby teams. Rugby is perceived as being the apex of masculine achievement. It has been variously described as a religion, a rite of passage to adult malehood (which good kiwi blokes never grow out of). Our most successful rugby players are reverred as national icons and are seen as embodying all that is male and heterosexual.

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> It was never used in a positive way, I never heard it...homosexuality used in a positive way. It wasn't a big thing though, it wasn't really a main topic. It was just like a dirty word. (William)

As suggested by Andy and William above, the peer group is a site in which much of our knowledge about 'acceptable' gender and sexuality roles is constructed. Connell et al (1982;77) suggest that students are active makers of sex/gender identities, in which they have complex social and psychic investments. As indicated by Mac An Ghaill (1994:90) much of this 'takes place at a collective level within the informal world of male group peers.' For the participants in this study the discourses operating in this 'informal' sphere contributed to their feelings of inadequacy , invisibility and isolation in respect to their masculinity and sexual identity. The effects of peer group behaviour limited the participants' choice concerning the management of their own public identities significantly. The participants could choose to construct a masculine conforming image and participate in the benefits ensuing from this or challenge these attitudes and risk disclosure and marginalisation from what was considered the masculine norm.

Isolation

Eight of the participants felt they were the only young gay males in their schools. The silencing of sexual minority youth in these contexts operated to maintain separation of the participants from eliciting support from other 'gay males' in their peer groups. These discourses also operated to instill fear in the participants of exploring the possibility of the existence of other gay males in their schools.

> Apart from me obviously I don't think there was anyone at school who was gay or lesbian...I think you can safely assume that, but you never know three hundred students...(Andrew)

It is ironic that of these eight participants, four have met up with members of their peer group who now identify as gay. This brings into question the lack of obvious venues within school contexts that can provide for exploration of sexuality and masculinity that is safe for those who do not conform to masculine ideals.

> there appeared to be no gay students at my college except for me...I know some now that I have come out and left school ..(William)

For Mark and Richard who both acknowledged their sexuality to their peer group, family and teachers during their schooling, the isolation they felt as the only openly gay students was compounded by the lack of venues where they could openly express and explore their sexuality. Likewise their apparently heterosexual peer group were not expected to explore their own sexuality or challenge their misconceptions about the limited possibilities and stereotypes they had of gay men.

For Mark this meant that he had to limit his interactions with his male peer group, and the venues in which these took place. In this case his peer group's misconceptions of gay people served to isolate him within the school and home environments. Ironically, he did not perceive these limitations prior to identifying as gay at school when he was fifteen.

> Not going to the movies with one of my male friends by himself...that would not be a good idea because it could if it got out have repercussions on him...so I set myself limitations which I think are as much the other person's welfare as my own.. just not being seen to be too friendly with any particular person...(Mark)

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All of the participants in this study experienced direct or indirect verbal abuse concerning sexuality or questioning their masculinity. The participants who conformed sufficiently to the masculine 'ideals' of the school environment and deflected abuse were witness to the effects it had on others, confirming their own fears about their sexuality and reinforcing their decision not to disclose their sexual orientation. For Andrew and James experiencing and witnessing overt verbal abuse concerning homosexuality was a frequent experience.

> nasty things like ankle snatchers, donut makers.. the list goes on Tongue in groove, pooh pushers...lots of things it is endless. (Andrew)

> name calling..like faggot and things like that and say how can you have sex with a man and all that kind of stuff um.. but ...yeah basically most of them were the male first XV type..I didn't really like them. (James).

The association of language with feminine and misogynistic body language contributed to the negative messages the participants were receiving about the possibilities of being gay and maintaining a masculine identity.

> ...they' d go all limp wristed and put funny voices on and things like that. Physically if someone was like that, they'd beat up on them.... harass them emotionally before they left the school....until they were miserable..(Andrew)

Andrew witnessed the effects of the continual harassment of a member of his peer group recognising that the harassment, a combination of physical and verbal abuse, was sufficiently powerful as to make daily life miserable. These forms of abuse contribute to young gay men 'playing truant', affecting their academic achievement and attendance. This led to four of the participants in this study taking time off school because of feeling isolated and/or abused. For Richard it meant that he missed out on twenty percent of his secondary schooling.

> That year I took a lot of time off. If I had felt more confident about myself and been motivated to succeed for myself..in total a day a week, maybe even more , I remember once I took two weeks off because I didn't have any friends and I was being picked on. Sometimes I would be at home saying I was sick when I wasn't but then I would become physically sick at the thought of going to school. (Richard)

For Andy and Mark the overt homophobic language and behaviour used in the classroom and out on the grounds of the school served different purposes. In the classroom the use of terms such as 'faggot' did not have the same degree of malice, however the classroom jibes could be seen as a forerunner to the more serious attacks used outside of teacher supervision.

> yeah I think there was genuine malice in the playground whereas I think in the classroom it was just .. it didn't have any meaning. It was just oh you big gay sort of thing. But um no there was..it sort of got nasty outside of the classroom rather than in the classroom (Andy).

> people calling each other a faggot...things like that..usually in the playground..during lunch hours and around the grounds..less in class but still it is prevalent..still there..usually at lunchtime and interval though...(Mark)

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For Peter the use of homophobic language around him threatened his carefully constructed 'heterosexual' identity as he questioned whether or not his peer group had found out about his homosexuality.

> when it was used at me by some particular guys who I wasn't so, sort of close with, I would sort of think 'oh shit, maybe they found out', maybe they found me out, it sort of hit me, it wouldn't mean just a word used for abuse, more like how did they find out, I hadn't done anything deviant, or devious thing. I wasn't showing deviant behaviour so there was no way they could find out, so why were they calling me this word? (Peter)

For Andrew, bearing witness to the harassment occuring meant that he, along with his peers who found the behaviour unacceptable, felt powerless to confront the harassers for fear that this would bring his sexuality into the spotlight and exacerbate the situation.

> I would sit back and try to ignore it really. There was nothing I could do because it would turn into a riot really. That was the general feeling of everyone...you couldn't help this person that was being picked on...
> (Andrew)

For the participants' in this study, who have experienced secondary school at a time when National Legislation in the form of the Homosexual Law Reform (1986) and the Human Rights Amendment (1993) have supposedly changed attitudes concerning homosexuality, the reflections offered above suggest that it is still not safe to 'come out' in the school context.

Is it safe to come out now ? : Public and private selves

> the general public just think of the negative stereotypes and stuff like that ..it is their attitudes that oppress people...even though the laws have changed the attitudes haven't...(Zak)

In dealing with their emerging sexual identities the young men had to confront the stereotypical images and constructions of homosexuals and their lifestyles that had been communicated to them throughout their childhood and their schooling. The images of gay and/or homosexual men the young men in the study had built up through their childhood gave them cause for concern. The images described by the participants ranged from camp stereotypes through to child molesters through to lonely and depressed older men with little or no support networks. The fear of discovering any of these possibilities within themselves discouraged the young men from taking on a gay identity or even admitting the possibility to themselves. The issue that the positive consideration of these identities are not currently included within current school discourses is of concern and suggest that it is not safe to come out now, while still a member of school communities. Davies (1993, p.121) suggests that where boundaries are least clear the strongest taboos exist, in this case the boundaries are the heterosexual (acceptable, active, masculine, normal) and homosexual - (unacceptable, feminine and passive, abnormal). For the participants in this study stepping outside the boundaries of acceptable masculine and sexual identities unfairly limited the possiblities of identity open to them. For Andy this meant that he felt he would uncover some sort of 'trizzie queen' in himself that was in opposition to his carefully constructed masculine, rugby playing image.

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> I just didn't know whether I was going to become some trizzie queen or something like that I'd been trying to cover up..suddenly I thought this monster was going to emerge and I would turn into Julian Clary or something. (Andy)

For William, the constraints of the childhood images suggested he would become a child molester 'lurking' in dark alleys snatching younger children and 'recruiting' them to the fold.

> I thought they (gay men) were child molesting people that went out in the community and were flashers and that...grabbed children off the street..public toilet kind of people..go and hang around in a dark park and wait for someone to pick up..a very negative dark image (William)

However, the innate sense he had of his own self provided the information necessary for him to challenge the messages he had recieved concerning 'gay' life received by him during his early childhood.

> ..it wasn't until I took a good look at myself...realised that I wasn't like that and I was gay and I didn't have to be like that...I was worried that I would end up like that. (William)

For Peter and Andrew, the accessing public toilets as sex venues confirmed for them that this was the whole limited gay world, naturally fitting the perception of gay men as promiscuous people who separated out a public and private persona.

> I thought toilets and what not was what gay men did. I didn't realise there was anything outside that. (Peter)

However, Andrew's and Peter's sexual experiences in public toilets provided the impetus for them to realise that they were gay. In one sense they were acting out their sexual attraction for men reinforcing the active/passive, public/private binaries supported by the enacted school curriculum. Andrew's first experience at thirteen came five years before admitting to himself that he might be gay. His visits to the toilets for sex were able to be separated from the life he was living with his family and peer group from whom he kept this a secret and continues to.

> I came out through the toilet scene..which started as early as thirteen...it was a periodic thing that happened sort of once every six months..it was a physical thing and something that I didn't understand at the time...I was a bit young really..in fact very young..but I knew there was something different about me to everyone else....and I had no qualms about what I was doing.. (I found the toilet scene)..by chance...really from my own curiosity ..not from anything else...I wasn't molested or anything...some one would come along...it was by chance..I wandered in and found a situation I didn't necessarily disagree with...I took part in the activity....(Andrew)

Peter and Andrew both felt 'disgusted' and 'excited' by the experience. This physical activity for both young men was clearly separated from their intellectual and emotional responses to feelings of sexual attraction for other men. It is important to state that neither participant felt they were enticed or recruited into having gay sex. What is significant is that both to some extent felt that this was what being 'gay' was, that there were no alternative venues and that gay life had no other existence because neither had been exposed by their families, communities or schools to any other alternatives.

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> my first experience, what caused me to come out to myself was my first experience was in a public toilet, I went there to go the toilet and I eventually got picked up by this guy in the toilet. That was my first experience. During the experience it was like, 'oh wow, this is really excellent, afterwards you know the old story, its like...you just feel disgusted with yourself...and ..all those years of having been conditioned at the hostel...you know, I didn't really feel very good about myself, I sort of went back to the hostel, and thought 'oh shit, what if I get found out?'. Like my whole world would be in turmoil and I just went to the bathroom and washed, I washed myself and thought 'shit, I've got to play this one right'. (Peter)

Similarly, Sasha felt that gay men led secretive lives which was in opposition to his own feelings of the need to be open .

> I suppose I had never met anyone who was gay...I suppose it comes from that feeling..I suppose I felt if there were gay men out there they must live secretive lives and...I'm suspicious of things that aren't open or I was then. (Sasha).

Compounding these negative stereotypical images the young men also came to perceive gay lifestyles and the assumption of a gay identity in deficit terms. For Mark, Sasha, and Richard this meant giving up the possibility of having children and long term relationships. These responses indicate the heterosexual privileges and male privileges that are perceived to be at risk. Sasha perceived that he would be very lonely, and that 'coming out' as a gay man would cost him the privileges of home and family that he had been brought up to believe were important, his perception of gay life suggested that the two could not possibly co-exist, bringing him to question what it was he wanted out of his life.

> I suppose I thought that I was going to be very lonely and that everything I had planned for my life would be gone...the hardest thing about coming out was having to change everything that I wanted out of life..I had this nice middle class family ..with a nice little house which was what I had always wanted in order to enjoy it more..I had to change what I wanted in order to enjoy life, to appreciate it more. (Sasha)

For Andy, limited exposure to gay images led him to believe he was abnormal.

> It was always a major thing...the fact that I was abnormal, that I felt abnormal. I didn't think that it was possible to actually live a happy life and feel the way I did. So I guess that is pretty big proportions.
> (Andy)

For three of the participants viewing their homosexuality as a rite of passage to heterosexual adulthood was seen as a possibility. For Andy this meant that he lived in constant fear that it wouldn't.

> Pretty terrified. It wasn't what I wanted. I didn't want to feel the way I did and I sort of started off by thinking that I was going to grow out of it and that everybody felt the same way I did and that nobody else really felt attracted to women and that they were just pretending like I was. No, I didn't want to feel the way I did and I thought I was going to grow

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> out of it. But I still am. When 15 came round (laugh) I sort of got a little worried and then when 17 came round I was absolutely petrified.
> (Andy)

Similarly, Peter prayed that his 'gay' feelings were simply a stage he was going through. He now identifies the power of the social conditioning that operated around him to suggest that a normal life was heterosexual, married with children. This reinforced the public/private separation he had made between his active sex life in the toilets and his apparently 'successful' public persona of school prefect.

> I would be crying some nights, just praying to God to make me straight and things because I didn't want to be gay. I guess that is how much the school and community had conditioned me. I was hoping that it was just a phase..I wanted to get married.. well...one part of me said I wanted to get married, to have children and lead a normal life (Peter).

As a result of these meanings, that to be gay was in opposition to being 'normal' Peter perceived that if he wanted to be accepted by his teachers, peer group and family his only option was to construct a heterosexual and masculine identity.

> Well I wish I could be gay and have people accept me but I just tossed that out the window because I didn't think that miracle would ever happen. The only option was to be straight. (Peter)

Risks of disclosure

One of the most significant impacts on the lives of the participants of the limited possibilities of gay life represented to them through their families, schools and communities was that it imbued in them a sense of danger in respect to disclosing their sexuality. As Connell (1995,p.148) suggests 'public discourse takes heterosexuality for granted' which is the preferred and supported sexual behaviour but not always what 'happens in practice'. The young men in this study recognised that the taboos of their 'homo'sexuality needed to be hidden and that there was a need to construct public identities that were perceived as normal, acceptable, masculine and heterosexual. As Andrew implies learning to reject his gayness was part of growing up.

> At that time I didn't think I could do anything, I think it was last year or the end of the year before that perhaps maybe ..um it would be better to be heterosexual.. I wish I was kind of thing..it would make things a bit easier at an earlier age I embraced my gayness..but I learned to reject it. (Andrew)

In this respect the choices made available to the participants in respect to their sexuality was to learn to reject it or face rejection themselves. William, Andy, Peter, Zak perceived rejection by their peer group as the greatest risk of identifying as gay.

> being rejected was the biggest risk..I didn't want to be totally rejected ...if I did tell someone news would spread and I would just become known as the gay person which wasn't what I wanted..or be known as...and then I don't know just be an outcast I suppose. (William)

The fear of rejection contributed to eight participants decision not to identify as gay or discuss their sexuality while still at school.

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> Not at school ..after...I thought I may as well wait until I had finished school....before I did it ...because of the chance that they might reject me. (Zak)

Alex's experience once his sexuality became common knowledge around the school underscores the truths of the participants' feelings of possible rejection. The positioning of Alex as being the one with the 'problem' rather than the homophobic behaviour of his peer group underscores the present limited appreciation of sexuality by the wider school community.

> I know that everyone at school thought 'poor Alex' he is under so much stress because he is gay..I knew that when I was twelve and didn't have a breakdown..it was because I had this dork telling me I was possessed twenty four hours a day.. it makes me really angry because I know that is what the school thought 'Poor Alex..' (Alex)

Similarly, Andy implies identifying as gay would have cost him his status in the school community. This he learned through observing the treatment of a member of his peer group who displayed less than masculine behaviours.

> Oh losing my friends, which would have happened. Well there was one individual in our class who did not come into the common room after a certain incident and... he was more or less ostracised by the greater student population.. I saw the same fate for me being found out, I don't know possibly worse because I had a higher public profile in the school, throughout the school I had to stand up at assemblies and I was visible .. I think that being found out would have been a fate worse than death. (Andy)

The participants in this study learned to construct masculine and heterosexual identities as a matter of survival within the schools they attended. Their witnessing of overt homophobic behaviour, of the rewards of acceptance and peer group membership offered to those who conformed to masculine and heterosexual ideals confirmed for them that they needed to appear in their public worlds as 'straight acting lads'.

> I guess I tried to be more straight acting and...um...but not to the point that I would do anything with a girl or anything like that. I would like probably be more abusive, like verbally sort of thing. Just sound like a lad sort of you know. Not try to seem different from the rest of the guys... (Peter).

As William and Peter both suggest this meant they were acting out a role in their schools and within their peer groups that met with the expectations of masculine and heterosexual identity of their communities. For William, this meant that he ensured that he never excelled at any activities that were seen as 'male' domains for fear that this would bring the 'spotlight' on him risking the exposure of his sexuality.

> I acted out a role. I wouldn't kind of....I did speak but I wouldn't be overly talkative. I kept very quiet in most circumstances, and kept a low profile... I wouldn't win the swimming sports or anything although I probably could..I would slow down..deliberately hold back..if I won I would get closer to the popular group so I would slow down...try not to get in the spotlight...and choose friends who wouldn't put me in any situation where I might be exposed...(William).

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New venues : queer possibilities ?

> After the interview last week I felt much better about myself...it was all brought out into the open...it has gone back a bit but I still feel better about myself...(Zak)

The research process provided one of the first venues for most of the participants to articulate their experiences and have them validated. This was the first opportunity many of them had to tell their stories and this proved to be an empowering and in some senses, cathartic experience, both for the participants and for myself. Because of the pain that many of the participants expressed, this was a complex process.

After the interviews, several of the gay male participants expressed anger for having to participate in a process that highlighted the degree to which they had been silenced in their school and communities regarding the development of their sexual identity. The interview process caused the participants to reflect on the complex decisions that they had made to hide their sexual orientation and the implications of these. This was particularly stressful for those who had seemingly colluded with the heterosexual 'macho' world and participated in homophobic behaviours;

> I spent so long pretending to be a straight person that I could be pretending to be a gay person. And they don't fit together at all. I don't fit into the gay community and I don't fit into the straight community ... I don't belong ... shit this is getting depressing ... (Andy)

As well as this the process required the participants to reflect on their perceptions of their place in the world. For Andy, neither the perceptions he had of the gay male world nor of the heterosexual world were satisfactory. This suggests once again that the current images of identity represented and reinforced within schools are unfairly limiting. For Andy the opportunity to explore issues of identity as an adolescent and as an integral part of his schooling needed to be provided in an environment where one was not seen as deficient.

> There were no gay role models around, there was no-one telling me it was ok to live that way. But there was a lot saying it was wrong and that it was abnormal and that it was illegal ... it was right through school, at home, my friends, everybody was telling me that it was wrong ... (Andy)

What the process has achieved for the participants is important. It appears that the reinforcement of the participants' identity and belief in themselves that the interviews and reflection necessitated is something that schools should be doing for their student populations in general. The participants in this study found the interview process helpful in that it allowed them to identify issues that still needed resolving in terms of their gay identity. This empowered the participants to deconstruct their experience in light of the heterosexist and homophobic educational institutions they had attended. This deconstructive process is significant as it demonstrates the importance of providing venues in which youth can explore possibilities and where limitations and judgements are not imposed. It was also helpful for the participants to see their responses framed in a theoretical analysis to reduce their previous feelings of isolation evoked by the schools they attended. The power of seeing and experiencing your experiences confirmed and reinforced by others through hearing their stories cannot be underestimated;

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> This whole interview was very enlightening and helpful for me. I finally realised what some of the problems were. I knew I had some but I couldn't put my finger on what they were. Slowly I am communicating more and it feels so good to be myself and to talk to others without feeling uncomfortable..it still annoys me that my emotional development has been set back 3-4 years though. (Zak)

The interview process effectively modelled gay male behaviour for the participants that encouraged them to think beyond perceiving their sexuality as being reduced to just a sexual act.This resulted in the provision of a venue where they could explore their feelings about their emerging gay identities. This also acted as a springboard for personal change in the level of self-esteem experienced by James;

> ... when I went back home I saw someone from school who I hadn't seen for about a year... someone had told her I was gay and she said to me ... "you seem a lot more confident now, a lot more able to relate to people"... I suppose it did have something to do with the fact that I hadn't come out at school and that I did have low self esteem there because I knew I was different (James)

Queer theories and pedagogies offer ways of thinking that move beyond the limiting homo/hetero binary, a place which leaves no room for movement or change. Sexuality is then perceived as a shifting changing continuum, a place where pleasure and variety can be explored (Leck, 1995), rather than an either/or choice. For Richard, this means that the privileges of heterosexuality and masculine identity need to be available to him to explore.

> It is much more defninite now but I now days I start thinking of .. I would like to be bisexual because it would be much easier. I'd like to have children and lots of things like that. And everytime I think about it then I just end up where I started - I am gay and that's it. When I was younger I guess I didn't think there was such a word as heterosexual either so I didn't think I was heterosexual, but I was attracted to females as friends. (Richard)

This narrow treatment of sexuality led the participants to perceive their sexual orientation in deficit terms. As they felt they were 'born this way', they seemed to have no choice in defining their sexuality. In this respect, full recognition of the fluidity and changing nature of sexuality in schools would have been helpful. Particularly significant would have been discussions surrounding differences between sexual orientation, behaviour and identity, in effect opening up considerable possibilities for youth to explore their sexuality along the continuum regardless of their perceived sexual orientation.

Queer pedagogy and the issues arising from this research process suggest that it is important to create environments where heterosexuality is deconstructed and where heterosexuality is discussed and explored rather than assumed. Heterosexuality is perceived as a homogenous and impermeable core which would be better served by a recognition of its heterogeneous nature which does not construct and limit possibilities through discourses designed to maintain its hegemonic power (Eyre, 1993; Quinlivan and Town, 1995).

For the participants in this research the experience of hearing themselves reflected in classroom dialogue was significant. This suggests that discourses concerning issues of sexuality need to be played out on multiple levels and in multiple venues.

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> I think it almost had a positive effect on me in that everyone was discussing it quite openly and there wasn't a major hassle about anything. (Zak)

> now I don't care..I do want to be more in the spotlight..to make up for the years I haven't been..it is a kind of release when you are out and have told people.you do not have to worry about anything..and you don't worry about being in the spotlight because you have nothing to hide...it is a major part of my life..being gay ..and to hide it..was difficult. (William)

However, the infrequency of these discussions and the limited number of venues in which they are occurring raise serious issues for concern. Once again, youth are not having their needs met and are so seldom involved in the process of determining what the content of the curriculum is to be.

Turning queer : Future directions ?

> I think for a start reduce the assumption in homes and schools that people are heterosexual, in terms of talking, like people talk about husbands and wives and children..that is part of how people are excluded..it is one more thing that isolates people. (Sasha)

Sasha's response to the question about what needs to change in respect to schooling and queer youth suggests the need to open new discourses surrounding sexuality. These 'new' discourses are emerging in academia, in the form of queer theories and pedagogies. What these have to offer the school environment and teachers in practical terms is yet to be explored.

However, queer theory and post structural considerations of identity, subjectivity and contexts opens up new venues for considering sexuality education and its place in schools. In questioning the relevance of the models of adolescent identity development that suggest that gay male youth need to go through stages to finally 'accepting' their sexuality, queer theorists suggest an alternative way of interpreting and perceiving the discourses that operate to limit the choices young men have in respect to their masculinity and sexuality.

Ultimately, asking people to rethink and reconceptualise sexuality is challenging. This can begin through the provision of venues within the school contexts in which issues of identity can be explored and repositioned. Such an approach will destablise heterosexuality, benefitting gay, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual youth, through a recognition of the diversity and difference which exists within communities. This will effectively render the categories along with their power to include or exclude, null and void. Rethinking the venues in which current discourses occur and providing new venues in schools and communities to examine the limitations of current beliefs about sexuality, sexual practice and gender roles is a necessary step on the way to opening up new possibilities for all youth.

The research process and the production of writing from it has required to some extent a crossing of the boundaries in an attempt to open up the possibilities for youth . Looking toward the future, it is clear that currently there is a significant gap between what policy-makers, teachers, administrators and the like see as beneficial for youth and what youth themselves perceive as important. Queer pedagogy makes possible venues in which youth perspectives can be explored producing new venues and discourses. In doing so it will provide freedom for the exploration of identity for all youth, removing the focus from the

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binary of homo/heterosexuality, to a consideration and exploration of the complex multi dimensions of sexuality.

So what does a queer future look like ? How will the Human Rights legislation that is in place to protect sexual minorities translate into educational practice ? For school administrators in Aotearoa/New Zealand it suggests that a beginning would be the development of policies, procedures and practices for dealing with negative behaviour and attitudes towards those who do not conform along the binaries of masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual. For the classroom teacher a queer future will require a reconsideration of the way in which their classrom environments, curriculum areas and practices reinforce those binaries and the silences that they perpetuate. This implies the need for teachers to challenge their preconceptions about sexuality and rethink sexuality. When this rethinking occurs it will open up new possibilities for youth to perceive identity in broader terms, as more than just 'stereotypes', played out in 'installments' and 'hierarchies'. (Britzman,1995a).

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